

*□□□□□□ Vermont students and higher education officials discuss education legislation at Vermont Technical College forum*

As Vermont students returned to campus this week, Rep. Peter Welch held a roundtable Wednesday morning to discuss college affordability and gather input about pending legislation that could revamp the nation's financial aid system.

Welch was joined at the roundtable, which was held at Vermont Technical College in Randolph, by students and higher education officials from throughout Vermont. The group focused its discussion on the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (H.R. 3221), which passed the House Education and Labor Committee this summer and which is expected to come to a vote in the House this fall.

"Throughout Vermont, students and parents are struggling to afford college. While federal financial aid programs help many Vermonters pay their tuition bills, many more still cannot afford this most important investment," Welch said. "As Congress weighs this comprehensive legislation, it is important for me to hear Vermonters' feedback to ensure that we pass a bill that expands access and improves affordability."

H.R. 3221 is broad-ranging legislation that would increase the maximum size of Pell Grants, expand access to Perkins Loans, convert all new federal student lending to direct loans, create a new Community College Grant Program and simplify federal student loan applications.

Participants in Welch's forum included Tim Drew, a Community College of Vermont student, and Jessica Grout, a senior at Vermont Technical College. Representatives from the following organizations and institutions also took part: Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, Vermont Technical College, the University of Vermont, Champlain College, Norwich University, Union Institute and University, New England Culinary Institution, College of St. Joseph, Vermont Law School, Marlboro College, Goddard College, Burlington College, St. Michael's College, Johnson State and Southern Vermont College.